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SOURCE Verkehrs-Wirtschaft.MODERNIZATION OF THE RHINE-RUHR RAIL NETWORK

PLANS PROPOSED -- Duesseldorf, Verkehrs-Wirtschaft, 22 Nov 52

To improve the profitability of the Federal Railroads (Deutsche Bundesbahn) and to eliminate the deficit, three possibilities have been suggested: (1) an increase in transport rates, (2) accounting for direct and indirect political burdens in general federal funds, and (3) a thorough rationalization and modernization of railroad operations.

The first is out of the question because it would reduce the ability of the railroads to compete; the second cannot be accomplished at present, because the financial position of the Federal government does not permit it; and the third cannot be carried out with the railroad's own funds but requires long-term loans. Since there is a shortage of capital, the Laender are the only possible creditors for such an undertaking. The fact that Laender credits are earmarked specifically for improvement of transport in the creditor Land limits the use of these funds by the railroads. However, there is no argument about the point that electrification of main lines and dieselization of branch lines is the best method. Land Bayern and Land Baden-Wuerttemberg have therefore granted sizable credits to the Federal Railroads for the expansion of the already existing electrified network. Land Nordrhein-Westfalen has also agreed to supply the sum of 150 million Deutsche marks (West) required for electrification of the Hamm - Essen - Duesseldorf - Koeln - Remagen (Land border) main lines.

There has been basic agreement about this plan between the Federal Railroads and Land Nordrhein-Westfalen for about a year, and the plan has been approved by the Federal Ministry of Transport. At that time /November 1951/, the Federal Railroads did not want to commit themselves, but felt that the signing of the contracts should be left to the new board of directors, especially since it was known that there were differences of opinion within this board about the system of electrification to be used. The most important member of the board, is in favor of 50-cycle current, while the others are supported by Land Nordrhein-Westfalen in their opinion that 16 2/3 - cycle current should be used.

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Before final approval by the Administrative Council of the Federal Railroads, the manner of availability of credits had to be settled. Nordrhein-Westfalen at first thought that it could supply the money only in installments of 30 million Deutsche marks, for budget reasons, while the railroads were unwilling to enter into an agreement unless the entire 150 million Deutsche marks were guaranteed. A compromise solution has now been found, under which Nordrhein-Westfalen will supply 90 million Deutsche marks, sufficient for electrification of the Hamm - Essen - Duesseldorf line, and will guarantee that the rest of the funds required for electrification of the line to the land border will be made available. The contract will thus be signed.

At present, the Technical Committee of the Administrative Council of the Federal Railroads is debating the question of the system to be used on the lines to be electrified. It will make its report on 8 December 1952. It is expected that its findings will agree with those of the Committee (Arbeitsgemeinschaft) for the Electrification of the Federal Railroads and the Technical Group of the Advisory Council for Transport Science (Verkehrswissenschaftlicher Beirat), which have come out in favor of 16 2/3 cycles. Recently, a committee of the most important manufacturers of electrical equipment in Germany also issued a report favoring this system. As a matter of fact, the South German electric railroad network, as well as that of all other European countries, operates on 16 2/3 cycles. The only exception is in France, where a 100-kilometer experimental line, operating on 50 cycles, has been built. An experimental line using 50-cycle current is also in operation in the Schwarzwald, but the results there have been somewhat less than satisfactory. If the Rhein-Ruhr rail network is electrified for the use of 50-cycle current, this would allow creation of a unified network including northern France and the western portions of the Federal Republic, but on the other hand it would split the German electric rail network in two, since the electric railroads south of the Main River operate on 16 2/3 cycles.

This would require the building of five or six stations for change-over, and would entail a delay of the trains; such a change-over would not matter at frontier stations, where the trains have to make a stop of some duration anyway.

The same railroad authorities who have favored the 50-cycle system have now come forth with another suggestion, without waiting for the report by the Technical Committee. This plan makes the whole idea of electrifying the Rhine-Ruhr network illusory. It recommends dieselization of the Rhine-Ruhr rail network, and extension of diesel-operated lines to South Germany. This plan is based on the argument that dieselization will require investment of less money by the Federal Railroads and, in addition, will be quicker to accomplish than electrification. These are good arguments, but there are serious weaknesses in the plan.

First, the fuel required for diesel operation can be obtained only from abroad, which would put a heavy load on the German foreign currency situation. It should be mentioned that this plan was suggested a few years ago and was rejected for the reason stated. It is therefore strange that it should crop up again, especially since representatives of the diesel-engine manufacturers have stated that electrification of main lines is more advantageous than dieselization, although the situation is different in regard to the modernization of branch and feeder lines.

Second, it must be borne in mind that modernization of the Rhine-Ruhr network cannot be delayed much longer. While Nordrhein-Westfalen, as already stated, is willing to underwrite electrification of the network, it is doubtful whether the funds would be made available for dieselization. While the primary reason for the financial aid promised by Nordrhein-Westfalen is the improvement of service on the lines of the Federal Railroads, there is a secondary consideration

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involved. This is the utilization of coal, which would probably be of great importance for the further development of coal mining in Nordrhein-Westfalen. Thus, the Federal Railroads would have to raise the required funds for dieselization by themselves, and, in view of their present financial troubles, they would hardly be in a position to do so for quite some time.

It goes almost without saying that the electrification will cover only the main lines in the Rhine-Ruhr region, while the branch lines will be dieselized. The reason is simply that complete electrification of the Rhine-Ruhr network would require about 500 million Deutsche marks, an amount which is far above the capabilities of even as prosperous a land as Nordrhein-Westfalen.

Legislative circles in Nordrhein-Westfalen are beginning to be annoyed by the attitude of the Federal Railroads, and are putting pressure on the Land government to get some action.

FIRST STAGE OF ELECTRIFICATION APPROVED -- Duesseldorf, Verkehrs-Wirtschaft, 6 Dec 52

The Administrative Council of the Federal Railroads, in its meeting on 2 December, approved the offer by Land Nordrhein-Westfalen of a credit in the amount of 90 million Deutsche marks (West) for the electrification of the Ruhr railroads. The money will be used for the first stage of the project, the electrification of the Dortmund - Essen - Altenessen - Oberhausen - Duisburg - Duesseldorf line. According to the Frankfurt newspaper Neue Zeitung of 4 December 1952, the money will be used to electrify the Hamm - Essen - Duisburg section. The Technical Committee of the Administrative Council requested that the electric system be built in such a manner that both 50-cycle and 16 2/3-cycle current can be used. This request was also approved.

The Federal Cabinet must still give its approval, after which work can be started at once. It is expected that the cabinet will act on the measure very soon.

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